

Committee on Veterans
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THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

COMMITTEE REPORT OF THE HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION

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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS

Hon. Chaim Deutsch, Chair

June 19, 2018

INT. NO. 391:

By Council Members Ulrich and Brannan

TITLE:

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to benefits counseling services for veterans

ADMINISTRATIVE CODE:

Amends Title 31 by adding new section 31-106

INT. NO. 394:

By Council Members Ulrich and Brannan

TITLE: A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to creating veterans resource centers

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INT. NO. 396: By Council Members Ulrich and Brannan

TITLE: A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the creation of a veterans resource guide

ADMINISTRATIVE CODE: Amends Title 31 by adding new section 31-107

INT. NO. 647 By Council Member Eugene

TITLE: A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to peer support services for veterans

ADMINISTRATIVE CODE: Amends Subchapter 3 of chapter one of title 3 by adding a new section 3-130

INTRODUCTION

On June 19, 2018, the Committee on Veterans, chaired by Council Member Chaim Deutsch, will consider four pieces of legislation, all of which are designed to provide a more comprehensive set of support services for veterans who live in New York City. Int. 391 would require the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) to provide counseling services to veterans seeking assistance with benefits to which they may be entitled based on their service. Int. 394 would require DVS to establish at least one Veterans Resource Center in each borough. Int. 396 would require DVS to maintain and periodically update a resource guide for veterans. Finally, Int. 647 would require DVS to create a peer support hotline for veterans. Those invited to testify at this hearing include the Commissioner of Veterans Services, veterans' advocates, and service providers.

BACKGROUND

Veterans' Needs

Approximately 20 million veterans live in the United States.¹ Veterans are demographically diverse by age, family structure, education, and income and display a variety of needs that cannot fully be addressed by a one-size-fits-all strategy.² The most commonly identified veterans' needs include services and supports that address mental health needs, physical health needs, employment, and housing.³ Barriers that decrease veterans' access to these services include lack of awareness of existing services, excessive paperwork, perceived low quality of services, and the stigma attached to mental health.⁴ These barriers are often

¹ Penn State Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness. Retrieved June 4, 2018, from <http://www.hjfc3.org/site/assets/files/1521/supportusveterans2017nov.pdf>.

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ Id.

exacerbated by the ways in which these needs intersect. For example, veterans may have trouble finding employment because they do not have stable housing, and they may struggle to maintain employment in the absence of reliable housing arrangements. Thus, the bills presented at this hearing seek to alleviate these problems by offering additional support, resources, and services to struggling veterans.

Veterans' Services in New York State

Currently, in New York State, the Division of Veterans' Affairs (VA) provides a variety of educational, housing, and legal services for veterans.⁵ For example, the State VA offers opportunities for veterans to speak at schools through the "Veterans Speaker Program," defer their student loans, earn tuition awards through the "Veterans Tuition Awards" program, and pursue opportunities such as the Fry Scholarship, which provides Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to the children and surviving spouses of servicemembers who died while on active duty after September 10, 2001.⁶ Legislation signed in 2008 by former Governor David A. Paterson established tuition awards of 98 percent for veterans who are enrolled in a vocational training program or any undergraduate or graduate degree-granting institution in New York State.⁷

To ensure that veterans have stable housing, the State VA has a "Homes for Veterans Program," which provides specialized mortgages for former servicemembers.⁸ New York State also operates the Veterans Affairs Supported Housing Program (VASH), which is a collaboration between the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the VA, in which

⁵ New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs. Retrieved June 4, 2018 from <https://veterans.ny.gov/>.

⁶ Education and Training. Retrieved June 7, 2018, from https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/fry_scholarship.asp

⁷ New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs. Retrieved June 7, 2018, from <https://veterans.ny.gov/content/veterans-tuition-awards>

⁸ New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs. Retrieved June 11, 2018, from <https://veterans.ny.gov/content/homes-veterans-program>

federal dollars subsidize the housing assistance payments of homeless veterans.⁹ HUD statistics indicate that it awarded \$43 million to 325 local public housing agencies in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017.¹⁰ Last year, New York received 182 additional vouchers for a total of \$1.7 million.¹¹ New York has more than 5,000 total vouchers statewide.¹² There are also three New York State property tax exemptions available to veterans. The Alternative Veterans' Exemption is available in more than 95 percent of taxing jurisdictions across the state and is accessible to veterans who have served during times of war or who have received expeditionary medals. The Cold War Veterans' Exemption is available only on residential property of those who served during the Cold War, and the Eligible Funds Exemption reduces the assessed value of property that veterans purchase with "eligible funds," which can be a veteran's pension, bonus money, or compensation paid to prisoners of war.¹³ Finally, between 2008 and 2016, the state opened Veterans Treatment Courts in all five boroughs.¹⁴

⁹ Veterans Affairs Supported Housing Program (VASH) Funding Guide. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from <https://shnny.org/fundingguide/veterans-affairs-supported-housing-program-vash/>

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/hud_no_18_027

¹¹ Id.

¹² Veterans Affairs Supported Housing Program (VASH) | Funding Guide | SHNNY. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from <https://shnny.org/fundingguide/veterans-affairs-supported-housing-program-vash/>

¹³ Department of Taxation and Finance. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from <https://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/property/exemption/eligfndsoverview.htm>

¹⁴ Veterans Advisory Board Report for 2016, *NYC Department of Veterans Services*, available at http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/veterans/downloads/pdf/annual_reports/2016.pdf

Veterans' Services in New York City and the Functions of DVS

According to the Office of the State Comptroller, there are approximately 200,000 veterans living in New York City: 55,899 in Brooklyn; 34,687 in the Bronx; 37,065 in Manhattan; 50,999 in Queens; and 20,148 in Staten Island.¹⁵ New York City's veteran population represents 22.2 percent of New York State's total veteran population of 900,000.¹⁶

With the enactment of Local Law 113 of 2015, New York City became the largest city in the country with an agency solely dedicated to those who served in uniform. DVS' objectives include expanding education and professional opportunities for veterans through public, private, and non-profit partnerships; referring veterans to the benefits, resources and services that are available throughout the City; employing an integrative health model to promote the physical and mental wellbeing of veterans and their families; and connecting homeless veterans to permanent housing and support services. Some examples of DVS services and programming include "The Veteran Entrepreneurs' Edge," which is a program designed to encourage veteran entrepreneurship, the Veteran Peer Coordinator (VPC) Program, which advocates for peer-to-peer counseling for homeless veterans within the housing search process, and the "Mentor a Veteran" program, in which returning servicemembers can access career advising, test preparation assistance, and assistance in reintegrating into civilian life.¹⁷

DVS has offices in all five boroughs and maintains four main Program Areas: Central Administration, Community Outreach, Homelessness Prevention, and Mental Health.¹⁸ Within these areas, DVS' primary activities include expanding education and career opportunities

15 State Support For New York's Veterans, Office of the New York State Comptroller, Nov. 2015, *retrieved Sept. 19, 2017*, from http://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/other/veterans_11_2015.pdf.

¹⁶ Id.

¹⁷ New York City. Department of Veterans' Services. Retrieved June 4, 2018 from <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/get-help/mentor-a-veteran.page>

¹⁸ Department of Veterans' Services 2016 Annual Report. Retrieved June 11, 2018, from <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/veterans/downloads/pdf/2016DVSAnnualReport.pdf>

through a network of public, private, and non-profit partners, and ensuring that veterans can access benefits, resources, and services. DVS initiates and manages projects pertaining to Whole Health and Community Resilience (WHCR), Housing and Support Service (HSS), and City Employment, Education, Entrepreneurship Events, and Engagement (CE5).¹⁹

The WHCR team at DVS connects veterans and their families with programs such as the Hidden Heroes Initiative, which raises awareness about the challenges that military caregivers face, and training such as Mental Health First Aid for Veterans. The HSS team works with DVS' Aftercare Coordinator to refer veterans to community-based, state, and federal organizations and ensure that veterans can maintain their wellbeing, stability, and autonomy after staying in shelter.²⁰ Between March 2016 and May 2017, DVS held more than 300 community outreach events and provided one-on-one assistance to more than 2,300 veterans and family members as they applied for benefits such as the GI Bill and veteran property tax exemptions.²¹ Other efforts to improve quality-of-life include discounted memberships for veterans at all 36 recreation centers operated by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation.²²

DVS' operating budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 was \$4,418,769, 90.97 percent of which is city funds (\$4,020,051) and 7.4 percent (\$327,442) of which is state funds.²³ Both of these represent increases over FY17, when the department's overall budget was \$3,843,222, 91.51 percent (\$3,517,300) of which was funded by the city, and 8.48 percent of which

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ Meet Our Team. Retrieved June 7, 2018, from <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/about/angela-guytoncyril.page>

²¹ 2017 New York City Veterans Advisory Board Annual Report. Retrieved June 11, 2018, from https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/veterans/downloads/pdf/annual_reports/2017.pdf

²² De Blasio Administration Announces New NYC Parks Recreation Center Membership Rate. (2016, June 01). Retrieved June 7, 2018, from <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/499-16/de-blasio-administration-new-nyc-parks-recreation-center-membership-rate-veterans-and>

²³ Fiscal Year 2018 Expense and Contract Budget Resolutions, City of New York, Apr. 26, 2017, available at <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/adopt17-expreso.pdf>

(\$325,922) came from the state.²⁴ Between FY17 and FY18, DVS' overall budget increased by 14.97 percent, and the city-funded portion by 14.41 percent. Thus, the creation of DVS has led to a significant funding increase for veterans-related programs and services in the City.

CONCLUSION

The four bills being considered at this hearing would supplement the work that DVS is already doing and the services the agency is providing. The Committee seeks to learn more about current gaps in programming and services for veterans, what services veterans find to be helpful, what areas of need have yet to be identified and how to better serve and support NYC's veteran community.

²⁴ Fiscal Year 2017-Departmental Estimates, NYC Office of Management and Budget, June 8, 2016, available at <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/erc6-16.pdf>.

ANALYSIS

Int. No. 391

Section one of Int. No. 391 would amend the Administrative Code of the City of New York by adding a new section 31-106 to Title 31.

This section would require DVS to provide counseling services to veterans seeking assistance regarding federal, state, and local benefits to which they may be entitled because of their military service. These counseling services would be provided by agents or attorneys recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and would be available in at least one location in each of the five boroughs.

Section two of Int. No. 391 provides that the local law would take effect 90 days after it becomes law.

Int. No. 394

Section one of Int. No. 394 would amend the Administrative Code of the City of New York by adding a new section 31-106 to Title 31.

New subdivision a for section 31-106 would require the commissioner of DVS to ensure that at least one veterans resource center is established in each borough of the city. These centers would be located in an easily accessible geographic areas and close to public transportation. Their purpose would be to provide veterans with free, up-to-date information about matters as housing, social services offered by public and private organizations and financial assistance and tax exemptions available to veterans.

New subdivision b would require the commissioner of DVS to submit a report, once every six months, about the operation of these resource centers. The report should include, but not be limited to the following information, disaggregated by center:

- The number of veterans utilizing each center
- A summary of the services offered by the center
- A description of the services and/or information most frequently requested by veterans utilizing the center
- The number of full-time and part-time staff persons working at the center
- The amount of funding allocated to the center; and
- The number of complaints received by the center from veterans regarding the services offered, and a general description of the nature of these complaints

Section two of Int. No. 394 provides that the local law would take effect immediately.

Int. No. 396

Section one of Int. No. 396 would amend the Administrative Code of the City of New York by adding a new section 31-107 to Title 31.

New subdivision a for section 31-107 would require DVS to maintain and periodically update a resource guide for veterans. This guide will be available on the DVS website and would be available in printed form upon request.

New subdivision b sets out the minimum information required in the guide, which includes information about:

- Federal, state, and city benefits available to veterans based on their military service, including the criteria for eligibility and information on how to apply for such benefits;
- Provisions of federal, state, and local laws and regulations that afford special rights and privileges to members of the armed forces and veterans and their

families, including protections under the uniformed services employment and reemployment rights act

- Physical and mental health programs and resources available
- Educational and reeducational opportunities
- Available sources of low or no-cost legal assistance
- Social services, including, but not limited to, housing and food security supports offered by public and private organizations
- Programs and services administered by public agencies to support veteran-owned businesses
- Employment resources; and
- Any other information deemed relevant by DVS

Section two of Int. No. 396 provides that the local law would take effect 120 days after it becomes law.

Int. No. 647

Section one of Int. No. 647 would amend the Administrative Code of the City of New York by adding a new section 3-130 to Subchapter 3 of Chapter 1 of Title 3.

This section would require DVS to establish a peer support hotline for veterans as well as other peer support services, in partnership with veteran organizations. The phone number to this hotline as well as other information about these peer support services would be posted on the DVS website.

Section two of Int. No. 647 provides that the local law would take effect 90 days after it becomes law.

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Int. No. 391

By Council Members Ulrich and Brannan

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to benefits counseling services for veterans

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Title 31 of the administrative code of the city of New York is amended by adding a new section 31-106 to read as follows:

§ 31-106 Benefits counseling. The department shall provide counseling services to veterans seeking assistance regarding benefits to which they may be entitled because of their military service offered by New York city, New York state and the United States department of veterans affairs. Counseling services shall be provided by agents or attorneys recognized by the United States department of veterans affairs pursuant to section 5904 of title 38 of the United States code. Such services shall be available in at least one location in each of the five boroughs.

§ 2. This local law takes effect 90 days after it becomes law.

KET/JJ
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LS#652 01/02/2018 5:25PM

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Int. No. 394

By Council Members Ulrich and Brannan

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to creating veterans resource centers

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Title 31 of the administrative code of the city of New York is amended by adding a new section 31-106 to read as follows:

§31-106 Veterans Resource Centers. a. The commissioner shall ensure that at least one veterans resource center is established and operational in each borough of the city by no later than June 1, 2018. Each such center shall be located in a geographic area that is easily accessible and in close proximity to public transportation. Each such center shall provide veterans with up-to-date information, free of charge, regarding (i) matters within its purview pursuant to this title, chapter 75 of the charter and state executive law section 358; (ii) housing; (iii) social services offered by public agencies and charitable and private organizations, including but not limited to the provision of specific contact information with respect to such agencies and organizations; and (iv) financial assistance and tax exemptions available to veterans.

b. The commissioner shall, beginning January 1, 2019 and every six months thereafter, submit a report to the mayor and the speaker of the council regarding the operation of the veterans resource centers established pursuant to this subdivision. Such report shall include but not be limited to the following information for the prior six month period, disaggregated by each such center: (i) the number of veterans utilizing such center; (ii) a summary of the services offered by such center; (iii) a description of the services and/or information most frequently requested by veterans utilizing such center; (iv) the number of full-time and part-time staff persons working at such center; (v) the amount of funding allocated to such center; and (vi) the number of complaints received by such center from veterans regarding the services offered by such center, and a general description of the nature of such complaints.

§ 2. This local law takes effect immediately.

MWC/ENB

LS 660

LS 3776/Intro. 0298-2006/Intro. 0111-2010/Int. No. 829-2015

12/21/17

Int. No. 396

By Council Members Ulrich and Brannan

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the creation of a veterans resource guide

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Title 31 of the administrative code of the city of New York is amended by adding a new section 31-107 to read as follows:

§ 31-107 Veterans Resource Guide. a. The department shall maintain and periodically update a resource guide for veterans. Such guide shall be available on the department's website and shall be available in printed form upon request.

b. The guide maintained pursuant to this section shall include, but not be limited to, information about:

(1) federal, state, and city benefits available to veterans based upon their military service, which shall include the criteria for eligibility to receive and information on how to apply for each such benefit;

(2) provisions of federal, state, and local laws and regulations affording special rights and privileges to members of the armed forces and veterans and their families, including, but not limited to, protections under the uniformed services employment and reemployment rights act;

(3) physical and mental health programs and resources;

(4) educational and reeducational opportunities;

(5) available sources of low or no-cost legal assistance;

(6) social services, including but not limited to, housing and food security supports, offered by public agencies and charitable and private organizations;

(7) programs and services administered by public agencies to support veteran owned businesses;

(8) employment resources;

(9) any other information deemed relevant by the department.

§ 2. This local law shall take effect 120 days after it becomes law

ENB
LS#659
LS #4733/Proposed Int. No. 828-A
12/21/17

By Council Member Eugene

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to peer support services for veterans

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Subchapter 3 of chapter one of title 3 of the administrative code of the city of New York is amended by adding a new section 3-130 to read as follows:

§ 3-130 Peer support services. The office of veterans' affairs shall establish a peer support hotline and other peer support services in partnership with veterans associations and organizations which service veterans. The office of veterans' affairs shall post on its website the peer support hotline phone number and information concerning other peer support services offered.

§ 2. This local law takes effect 90 days after it becomes law.

BBB/KET / BM
Int. 324-2014 / LS 1392 / Int. 503-2011
LS # 699
12/28/17 2:45 p.m.